

PROCEEDINGS

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An aerial photograph showing two large US Navy ships, likely fleet ocean transporters, sailing in formation on a dark blue sea with white-capped waves. The ship on the right is viewed from the starboard side, showing its deck with various antennas, radar masts, and gun mounts. The ship on the left is viewed from the port side, showing its deck and a large crane. Both ships are moving towards the bottom of the frame, leaving white wakes behind them.

**Supporting the
600-Ship Navy**

"You Must Be Yourself"

By Secretary of the Navy John Lehman

*An address delivered at the
graduation ceremony of the Naval Academy
Class of 1983 on 25 May 1983*

It is impossible for a speaker in my situation not to be reminded of and think back to one's own graduation, one's own commissioning. I remember very distinctly at that time turning my mind to prayer. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "let the speaker be brief." It will be difficult for me to be brief, but I will do my best.

It will be difficult because in the 207-year history of our Navy and our Marine Corps, there has never been a more exciting time to join the fleet than today. We have had a true sea change of historic proportions in our nation. In a few short years the self-doubt, the post-Vietnam syndrome of negativism, of antimilitarism, of loss of faith has been transformed—transformed into a more American traditional approach based on optimism, based on self-confidence, and based on true support and appreciation for the role of our Armed Forces and our strength. Traditional American values are no longer held up to ridicule as being maudlin and romantic. But more importantly, America has turned once again to its military, to its military leaders, to set standards of integrity and excellence, and to restore American security and confidence in a very threatening world. And so, it is to you, the graduates of '83, that the American people are turning in a very direct sense. You have a President who believes passionately, as I do, that, in Douglas MacArthur's words, "However horrible . . . war may be, the soldier and sailor who is called upon to offer and to give his life in service for his country is the noblest development of mankind."

Like it or not, well prepared or not, the Navy and the Marine Corps and

our nation are now turning to you for leadership and for the future. First as platoon commanders, destroyermen, aviators, and submariners, then as commanding officers of these units, and then finally as task force commanders, battle group commanders, division commanders, Chiefs of Naval Operations and, in other walks of life, captains of government and industry.

In each of these steps along your path, you are going to face enormous challenges and many frustrations—the frustrations of life in any large disciplined organization. It is the nature of this magnificent calling that you are entering today. And while you submit yourself to the self-discipline and the organizational discipline that are necessary for success in this calling, you must learn at the same time to never, never surrender your own individualism and the sparks of innovation and of daring. Because our Navy and our Marine Corps are organizations not of kinds of people, not of virtues or of abstract principles, but of individuals, *individuals*. Never, never forget that.

You are coming into the fleet at a time that is in many ways the most threatening period this nation has ever faced. We have seen for the first time in this century an environment in which the outcome of an overall naval engagement globally is in doubt in the sense of our being able to achieve the broad global objectives necessary to defend all of our interests. The Soviet Union has built up a military capability, the statistics of which are all very familiar to you. It is real.

Within weeks, many of you will be looking across just hundreds of feet of water at some of the most modern technology ever invented in America.

Unfortunately, it is on Soviet ships. And we are meeting that challenge with a major buildup of machines, of weapons, of electronic warfare, but above all, we are meeting it with men and women. And it is your challenge to take over the leadership of the fleet, to take over the leadership of men and women of a quality that is higher than ever before in our history.

Now "safety first" has been the motto of a great many people who have risen to high places in government, but it has never been the motto of leaders. It is the leader who must face the danger. He must take the risk, and the blame. It is the character and qualifications of the leader that are transmitted to the men and women of the services. Show me the leader and I will know his men; show me the men and I will know the leaders.

To lead, you must resist the temptation to dull your intellectual curiosity. The great British strategist, Liddell Hart, made this point once in discussing problems in the British officer corps. He said, "A habit with the worst effect was the way that ambitious officers, when they came in sight of promotion to the generals' list, would decide that they would bottle up their thoughts and ideals, as a safety precaution, until they reached the top and could begin to implement them. Unfortunately, the usual result, after years of such self-repression for the sake of their ambition, was that when the bottle was finally uncorked, the contents had evaporated."

You must be yourselves. Value that individualism that only you have. Whatever you may hear in the common wisdom about the frustrations of Navy bureaucracy, believe me, the naval sys-

tem—the Navy soul—prizes your service, your individual dedication, as well as your discipline and your example. It prizes your intellect as much as Will and Ariel Durant, who wrote, "intellect is one of the most vital forces in all history. Out of every hundred new ideas ninety-nine will probably be inferior to the traditional responses which they propose to replace." But the 100th idea, the idea that is going to come from each one of you during your careers, may well change the world. You must understand that by accepting the discipline of your new calling, by accepting the regimen of military life, you do not escape the responsibility for innovation and for originality placed upon you by your education and your magnificent accomplishments which have earned you your place here today. And don't ever forget it!

I want to repeat my central theme today. This is the most exciting of all possible times to be joining our fleet. The transformation that has taken place in the country is reflected in the transformation in our fleet and our fleet marine forces. In just two short years, we have reversed one of the worst periods of retention when we had to tie up

ships at the pier for lack of sufficient manning. The period of lowest peacetime retention in the history of the Navy occurred just two years ago. Today we have every ship manned at full capacity; seagoing billets are oversubscribed, readiness is at its highest rate in peacetime history. And a fleet that had shrunk just two years ago to some 460 ships is already up to 514 ships—with another 110 a'building.

We now have all 15 aircraft carriers that will take us through the end of this century. We have now, finally, the latest in high-tech equipment coming into the fleet in sufficient numbers: Aegis cruisers, Harrier jets and Harpoons, submarines in numbers sufficient at last to deal with the threat, and, believe me, the Soviets see that. They see as they did just a month ago in our fleet exercises: 11 direct hits for 11 Harpoon shots—drone after drone shot from the sky under the watchful eyes of four Soviet spy ships. This is good. The Soviets see how good the fleet is that you are joining.

In recommissioning the battleship *New Jersey*, President Reagan said:

"Freedom to use the seas is our nation's lifeblood. For that reason, our Navy is designed to keep the sea lanes

open worldwide—a far greater task than closing those sea lanes at strategic choke points. Maritime superiority," he said, "for us is a necessity. We must be able in time of emergency to venture into harm's way and to win." I can assure you that our President will not, in your time, heed the advice of some in Congress to change our Academy cry to "Tie Army."

And so, you are taking over the leadership of a Navy that is expanding not in the "sweet by-and-by," but now—in your time—to deal with the threat and to make it clear to friend and foe alike that we will soon be able to defeat any threat to the interests of the Free World. You will be able to lead a Navy, right now, that will be able to sail into harm's way and win. We are no longer, in this country, interested in illusions of strength or the honeyed words of politicians about sufficiency. We are now building our force with you, our leaders, with one objective in mind: the capacity to win at sea. And we will have that capacity in your time and that will assure the peace. You individuals will assure the peace of the future. It is the leadership torch that is being passed to you today. I am sure that you will hold it high.

YOKOSUKA Base of an Empire by Tom Tompkins

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